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Views upon the Present Crisis.
A Discourse on the 6th of Dec.
1850, by Wm. H. Barnwell.
Charleston, S. C.



Class E 423

Book . B 26

Views upon the present Crisis.

A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED IN

ST. PETER'S CHURCH, CHARLESTON,

ON THE 6TH OF DECEMBER, 1850,

THE

DAY OF FASTING, HUMILIATION, AND PRAYER,

APPOINTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF SOUTH-CAROLINA.

✓
BY WM. H. BARNWELL,

RECTOR OF SAID CHURCH.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

CHARLESTON:

LETTER-PRESS OF E. C. COUNCELL, 119 EAST BAY.

1850.



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REVEREND AND DEAR SIR :—

The undersigned, of your congregation, who were so fortunate as to listen to your masterly effort to-day, in behalf of the cause of our beloved State, which now excites so painfully its length and breadth, being thoroughly impressed with the belief that the publication of your discourse would be of essential service to that cause, are induced respectfully to ask you to favor them with a copy of the same, that they may have it published forthwith—and thereby confer a great favor upon us all, who are,

With profound respect and esteem,

Yours most truly,

CHARLES EDMONDSTON,
JAMES LEGARE,
HOPSON PINCKNEY,
ROBERT A. PRINGLE,
C. A. DESAUSSURE,
G. A. TRENHOLM.

FRIDAY, 6th December, 1850.

GENTLEMEN :—

Be pleased to accept my acknowledgments for the flattering terms in which you speak of the discourse delivered at St. Peter's to-day.

In compliance with your request the manuscript is placed at your disposal.

With sincere regard,

Your friend and Pastor,

WM. H. BARNWELL.

DECEMBER 6th, 1850.

TO HIS EXCELLENCY,
THE HON. WHITEMARSH B. SEABROOK,
GOVERNOR OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF SOUTH-CAROLINA,

THIS DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION OF THE DAY OF FASTING, HUMILIATION, AND PRAYER,
APPOINTED BY THE LEGISLATURE AT HIS SUGGESTION; AND
PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CONGREGATION OF
ST. PETER'S CHURCH, CHARLESTON,

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

IN TOKEN OF THE AUTHOR'S HIGH REGARD FOR HIS
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE VIRTUES,

BY HIS FRIEND AND FELLOW-CITIZEN,

WM. H. BARNWELL.

CHARLESTON, December 7, 1850.

DISCOURSE.

1st KINGS, 20th, 11th,—And the King of Israel answered, and said,—Tell him:—Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast himself as he that putteth it off.

This was the message of Ahab to Ben-hadad,—and it seems to me not unsuited to the occasion which has convened us.

The commonwealth of which we are citizens, has been threatened by those who wield the power of the General Government. The Legislature, now in session, has appointed, at the suggestion of the Governor, a day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer, that the Divine Guidance may be imparted to that body, “in devising such measures as will conduce to the best interests and welfare of our beloved State.” In compliance with the request made in the Executive Proclamation, that the Clergy throughout the State assemble their respective congregations to-day, to unite in Prayer to Almighty God for His direction and aid, I have, at some personal inconvenience, returned to the city, that I might conduct your devotions, and suggest such thoughts as seem to me befitting the occasion.

I make no apology for entering upon the great political question which is agitating the country.

For the past, the present, and the future, I claim as deep an interest in all that concerns my native State, as most of her sons; and I see no reason why I should withhold from you the views I entertain at this crisis. If they seem to you wrong, you will pray that they may be rectified. If right, that they may prevail.

That South-Carolina has been formally threatened at present by the General Government, I do not affirm,—but he must have cast an unobservant eye upon the current of public affairs, who does not discover a covert, but decided menace on the part of those in authority, to prohibit, by force, the exercise of her unquestionable right, to resume the powers del-

egated to the General Government, and secede from the Union, if she sees fit. Had I the destinies of the State in my hands, instead of yielding to this menace, my answer would be that of Ahab, to the haughty Syrian, who boasted that the dust of Samaria could not suffice for handfuls for all the people that followed him. "*Tell him,—Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast himself as he that putteth it off.*"

A few reasons why I think the menace of the General Government, ought not to be regarded, will lead us to one or two words of caution against prevailing evils.

In the present controversy with the South, the General Government is a Usurper. The institution of slavery is guaranteed by the Federal Constitution. The General Government only exists in virtue of that Constitution. By the very terms of that instrument, powers not delegated to the General Government are reserved to the States. When, then, that Government is not only derelict in enforcing the guarantees of the Constitution, but invades the reserved rights of the States, it is nothing more or less than an Usurper. It is deliberately depriving the Sovereign States, which compose the Union, of that security which they expected to derive from it, and degrading them, by a denial of their authority to determine for themselves, whether or not, they intended to delegate the powers in dispute. It will not do, to say, that if each State is to judge for herself in a question of usurped power, the Union would be a rope of sand. If each State is not to judge for herself, what rights she meant to delegate to the General Government, who is to judge for her? The General Government? Where, then, the use of that clause which reserves any rights to the States? If the Government is the sole judge of the limitations of its powers, those limitations become a mere name. Is the Supreme Court the proper tribunal? In legal questions in matter of property, "*meum et tuum*," it is. But in questions of political power, where the rights not of individuals only, but of Sovereign States are concerned, to admit, as final umpire, a tribunal whose officers are appointed by, and dependent on, one of the parties for their maintenance and continuance in office, would be a singular mode of arbitration.

A question of private property, may involve one of political

power, and may thus be properly brought before the Supreme Court, and the decision of that Court, may be final between the individuals concerned. But the State whose political rights are incidentally implicated, is no more affected by that decision, than it would be by one of an Ecclesiastical Court.

Indeed, an illustration of the case may be taken from Ecclesiastical affairs. Suppose that a question of property should arise between the Vestry of a Church, and private individuals. It could be carried before the legal tribunals, and the decision would be conclusive, as to question of property involved, and the Court in coming to its conclusion, might settle for itself, many Ecclesiastical points. But none of these determinations would be binding upon the Church at large. It would have a perfect right to deny the validity of such *exparte* decisions ; and to insist, that the civil tribunals have no authority, whatever, to interfere with Ecclesiastical rights, considered as such. So far as the rights of an Ecclesiastical body are corporate, they of course, are under the jurisdiction of the civil tribunals ; but so far as they are spiritual, or Ecclesiastical, they are only under the control of Ecclesiastical authority. Take for instance the observance of this very day. Had the Legislature imposed a fine upon every Clergyman, who did not observe it, such a proceeding would have been clearly unconstitutional, and an act of glaring usurpation. Equally so, is it to my mind, for the General Government to interfere with matters which belong exclusively to the States. Nor do I conceive, that the usurpation could be at all legalized by a decision in its favor by its own tribunal, the Court of Appeals.

Believing then as I do, that in this whole crusade against the institutions of the South, which the General Government is waging, it is acting the part of a Usurper ; and believing that God is the God of Truth and Righteousness, and is opposed to usurpation, I would have our State do anything but acquiesce in the right of the Federal Authority, to coerce her.

But another reason for this opinion, is, that the General Government is dependent upon public sentiment for its strength, and public sentiment is against the coercion of a State.

The failure to enforce the Fugitive Slave Bill, in Massachusetts proves, to some extent, both of these positions. The pub-

lic sentiment of the North, was against the law, and though the Federal Executive is said to have threatened its enforcement ; it has not been done, and it will not be done. Except *in terrorem* the law is a dead letter ; and its repeal is the tocsin of party in the Northern States. And had the Law been solemnly declared "null and void" by the State of Massachusetts, convened in its sovereign capacity, and not by private assemblages of citizens merely, it is probable that even the Southern States would have objected to the power of the General Government being employed to coerce that venerable commonwealth, until the Conventions of the different States should determine whether she should submit, or secede from the Union.

True, the public sentiment of the country and of the world is against the institution of slavery ; and if its abolition depended upon the vote of mere majorities, it would be voted down to-morrow. True, South-Carolina is not in the best odor among her co-States ; and many would, perhaps, rejoice at her humiliation. Even her sisters of the South, might not be altogether displeased to see her crest lowered, and her boasted Palmetto in the dust. But the question for us to settle, is whether we ought to gratify such an improper feeling, and whether, after having now for years talked about our rights, and our readiness to maintain them, we should slink out of the issue, because, forsooth, other States, equally interested with ourselves, may have come to the conclusion that submission is security.

Why, if we must be humbled in the end before the power of this Ben-hadad ; let it be in the end. Let it only be after we have endured everything that a people can endure, rather than submit to deliberate usurpation.

South-Carolina should learn a lesson from the conduct of this usurping Syrian. Not content with Ahab's homage—he gathered his host together and besieged Samaria. "*Thy silver and thy gold is mine,*" was his insulting message—" *thy wives also, and thy children, even the goodliest, are mine.*" In vain does the terrified King of Israel reply in tones of deep submission : "*My Lord, O King ! according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have.*" The messengers came again and said—" *Thus speaketh Ben-hadad, saying, Although I have sent unto thee, saying, Thou shalt deliver me thy silver, and thy gold, and thy*

wives, and thy children: yet I will send my servants unto thee to-morrow about this time, and they shall search thine house, and the houses of thy servants, and it shall be that whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put in their hand and take it away."

So, I solemnly believe, will it be with the South in the present contest. The more she yields, the more will be demanded.

The purpose of the North, is to use the whole power of the Government for its own aggrandizement, and the destruction of an institution which we believe to be of vital importance to our welfare. Would then, that the result of the present Session of our General Assembly, might be like that recorded in the context.

"And all the elders, and all the people, said unto him, (Ahab), Hearken not unto him (Ben-hadad,) nor consent."

Another reason why I conceive South-Carolina should not be frightened into submission to the General Government is, that that Government is under influences confessedly luxurious, and a luxurious power is always more boastful than valiant.

Thus was it with Ben-hadad,—*"And it came to pass, when Ben-hadad heard this message, as he was drinking, he and the Kings in the Pavilions, that he said unto his servants, set yourselves in array. And they set themselves in array against the city. Nor did their boastfulness and intemperance cease even after the divinely directed King of Israel had marshalled his little host of seven thousand against them.*

"And they (the Israelites) went out at noon. But Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the Pavilions, he and the Kings, the thirty and two Kings that helped him. And the young men of the Princes of the Provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out and they told him, saying—There are men come out of Samaria. And he said, whether they come for peace take them alive, or whether they come for war take them alive."

But the result was not such as the haughty debauchee expected.

"So these young men of the Princes of the Provinces came out of the city, and the army which followed them. And they slew every one his man, and the Syrians fled: and Israel pursued them; and Ben-hadad, the King of Syria, escaped on an horse with the horsemen."

It is not for me to speak evil of dignities, or to condescend to personalities from this sacred place,—but I may be pardoned for expressing the opinion that the powers that be at Washington, are not of that hardy, energetic, warlike stamp, whose threats are to be dreaded as the unerring preludes to execution. Epicures do not usually evince either courage or strength. It is not every Sadanapalus, who turns out to be a hero. Before paper blockades, and the accidental reinforcements of the garrisons in her harbor, can frighten South-Carolina into submission, her oppressors must learn something of Marion's dinner. Luxurious as the age is, the scenes of the Revolution will be re-enacted, ere the single Palmetto be uprooted, and her right to independence or equality be abandoned.

But those who know most of the General Government, do not hesitate to charge it with gross corruption; and when has a corrupt Government proved itself competent to such a task as the subjugation of South-Carolina, in a case like this? Gold and not steel, is the metal such a Government uses, and I confess I dread more the United States' treasury than its armory. Those who stiffen their nerves against force, melt under a golden shower. The patronage of Government has seduced but too many whose virtue seemed immaculate, and I tremble for our commonwealth lest she too may encounter the blighting smiles of Executive favor, and shame, burning shame—the shame of having sold herself for money, be smirched upon her brow, and that of her sons.

Better, far better, that in proud and honest poverty, she gave her children to the sword, and her soil to her slaves, and her ports to the pirate, and her mansions to the owls and the bats, and her civilization and refinement and religion to barbarism, than that she permit herself to be bought by the fascinating but fatal bribe of a corrupt and corrupting Government.

Such, then, are some of the reasons why I would have the Legislature of South-Carolina withstand every influence that may be brought to bear against her from the seat of the General Government, and reply to those who, elated by the success of the combined influence of their proffered gold and their menacing steel elsewhere, have isolated her, and are counting upon her submission.—“*Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.*”

But it will not do to calculate on the weakness of an opponent. True, the General Government may be a usurper, and God may resist such. True, it is dependent upon public sentiment, and public sentiment may be against the subjugation of a State, even South-Carolina. True, the Government may be exceedingly corrupt and under luxurious influences, and thus destitute of military energy. Still, it may be proper to touch briefly upon some points of our own inherent strength.

We are unanimous. I mean not as to the time or mode of resistance. Many differ as to these ; but, that the State cannot and ought not to submit to the usurpations of the General Government, is the deliberate sentiment of almost every citizen who is at all identified with her welfare. Even those who would regard separate State-action as unwise, and still hope for the co-operation of the other Southern States, are ready to stand by the decision of the General Assembly at all hazards ; and should the young men in that body, who are naturally impatient of delay, take measures for placing the State at once upon her individual sovereignty, there are, so far as I am informed, few even of the oldest and most cautious, who will not cordially co-operate, as, indeed, by their allegiance, they are bound to do, in sustaining her, under any circumstances that may ensue.

A unanimity like this, when wielding a Government regularly organized, with a sword, with a purse, with a Constitution and Laws, with a Judiciary, with, above all, a righteous cause, cannot but be formidable to such an Administration as that at Washington, cannot but be respectable every where, except in the eyes of such of her enemies, or, alas, such of her sons, as hope to ridicule her into submission by laughing at her weakness. Weakness is not always contemptible. Nay, it is only so, when unsupported by moral strength. It is far more reputable to be overcome in a struggle for the maintenance of rights, than to succumb solely from fear.

The righteousness of our cause is an element of strength never to be lost sight of. It must be clear, whatever speculative notions any one may have as to the moral influence of slavery, that it is a fundamental institution of the Southern States, and that no Government on earth has the slightest right to meddle with it, either directly or indirectly. To attempt to

take away one's property because it consists in human beings, is as unrighteous an act as to rob him of any thing else. God, who, we conceive, has set a sacred guard around property, has been as careful, in his revealed code of guidance for human conduct, to prevent depredations and injuries upon that species of property which consists in persons, as in that consisting in things. One may think it questionable to hold a particular kind of property; but if it be legalized by the Constitution and laws, to deprive another of it illegally, is an iniquitous act, for which the disapprobation of God, and of all good men, may be expected. Now, it is against this course of proceeding that the Southern States are contending. Not only are efforts made in the halls of Congress itself to degrade them in a moral point of view, but the power of the Government is brought to bear against them, by excluding them from the common territory; and thus the political equilibrium between the Northern and the Southern States has been destroyed. Even some of the most liberal of the Northern statesmen have avowed their settled purpose not to extend the area of slavery by admitting any more slave States into the Union; so that this interest is doomed, if such a policy is acquiesced in, to a settled minority, in a Government, where the majority are bent upon its destruction. In such a controversy, the righteousness of our cause should sustain us.

But it is apparent to those who know our people, that they are ready to suffer extremities rather than yield. It may be, that the business men of the city have not fully prepared themselves for the commercial and other perplexities that may follow in the train of secession; but the mass of the people seem resolved to endure any pecuniary losses, any inconveniences, and encounter any dangers, rather than finally submit. If those who control the public affairs of the Federal Government, had any idea of the deep and settled purpose in the minds of almost every freeman in the State to carry out this quarrel to the uttermost, they would see that the subjugation of such a people was out of the question. We are no semi-barbarians, who have to be restrained by force from the wild excesses of ferocity, and subdued into the decencies of civilization. We are no propagandists of new and dangerous systems of government and society, who must be prevented by the strong hand of power

from upturning the foundations of social order, to establish our vague theories. We are no Mexican braggarts, who must be taught to respect the laws of nations by the last resort of sovereigns. Nor are we Hungarian or Irish insurgents, who have risen up in spasmodic desperation to hurl off a union which though constitutional, is felt to be galling. But we are a free, sovereign and independent State—a State which achieved its title to self-government by the sword; and which has maintained that title unimpaired and undisputed. We are a people not undistinguished by intelligence, wealth, refinement and piety. We were born, and are still, the proprietors of African slaves, in the ownership of whom we are protected not only by our own laws, but the laws of the Federal Union, and those of nations. And all that we ask for, is to be let alone. All that we demand of the General Government is, that we be not prevented from carrying our property with us, into any part of the common territory—and that if any of our slaves escape into the neighboring States, they be promptly restored to us. Less than this, cannot satisfy us. And if it be withheld, all that we do is, to resume those powers, which for general purposes we delegated to the Government, and secede from a Union which is dangerous rather than beneficial, inimical rather than brotherly.

Our capacity to persevere in a course of independence, will scarcely be questioned, by any acquainted either with our past history, or our present and yet to be developed resources. The Federal Union, which has built up other States, has, perhaps, retarded the growth of South-Carolina. We have not been the favorites of the General Government. Commerce, which is essential to our success, by affording a market for our staples, has been for the last thirty-four years shackled by that Government. So that we have been taxed not only as consumers, but as producers. From the foreign manufacturers, who are our natural allies, because they must have our cotton, we have been cut off by the operation of imposts for the benefit of the North, and in the whole system of general affairs, especially in the vast and extensive schemes of internal improvement, our Constitutional scruples have been no more respected, and our interests no more regarded, than if we had been out of the Union.

It is the settled conviction of some of our soundest and most judicious citizens, that our prosperity would be enhanced by separation from a Government which is only felt in its burdens. True, we could not at once expect that dignified position abroad, which belongs to a great and distinguished nation; but we should have what is better, self-respect and contentment at home. We should manage our own affairs, without the impertinent molestation of those whose object is to deprive us of our chartered rights.

The persuasion that the cause not only of religion but of civilization and humanity will be furthered by our resistance to the General Government, should restrain us from succumbing. Give the Abolitionists their wish, and religion will not only suffer, but civilization be retarded, and the negroes themselves involved in calamities that would end in a relapse to utter barbarism. We claim for the institution of Southern slavery, that it has done more for the religious, social and physical condition of the African race, than has ever been done in the same space of time by any other institution, for any other nation. In less than two centuries, three millions of them now living—to say nothing of the dead—have been brought into a state of at least nominal Christianity; have been made familiar with the business of agriculture and many of the useful mechanic arts; have been placed in contact with all the usages and benefits of civilization; have been fed, clothed, housed, and healed with a degree of constancy and comfort, that surpasses that of the peasantry of almost every part of the world; and are multiplying with a rapidity which attests their wholesome condition. This being the fruit of African slavery in the Southern States, judge whether those States ought not to withstand the visionary and incoherent schemes of those who would attempt they know not what, and pull down, in a moment, institutions which, with many defects, like all things human, have yet, under the operation of Divine Providence been instrumental in an immense deal of true, substantial good. To the Abolitionists, at least, if not to the General Government; to these newly raised friends of the negro, who would either entice him away from his owner, or stir him up to insubordination, we may well say, in the language of Ahab to Ben-hadad, "*Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.*"

The passage, however, should also be applied to ourselves in the way of caution. Let us beware of boastfulness. Those who use strong words, find it often difficult to make them good by strong deeds—and a brave spirit would always rather have his performance outstrip his promise. Doubtless it is one of the faults which we should confess this day—that as a commonwealth, we have talked too much and too strongly on the subject, unless we intended to do more. If any think that in the remarks now made, there has been a tincture of boastfulness. Let it be. I am ready to confess and repent of everything, except the solemn, steadfast purpose to say what it seemed to me right and proper to say.

At all times, but especially at a crisis like this, we should avoid a reliance upon human means. They are to be used, but not relied on. We ought to be prepared to meet physical force, with physical force; but the God of Truth, Righteousness and Peace should be our dependence.

Pretexts of all kind should be avoided at present, especially such as affect our relations to our co-States of the South. When we tell them that we feel incompetent or unwilling to lead in this opposition to the General Government, they do not believe us; and they ought not to believe us, for we *are* the proper leaders in such a contest. We have been in it before single-handed, nay without the aid of a large part of our ablest and best men; yet we gained our point. We broke down the tariff. We hurled defiance at the head of the Great Captain of the country, with the whole force of the Union at his disposal. We declared “null and void”—and it has been, and is, and will continue to be, “null and void,” within the limits of South-Carolina—the odious force bill. And we passed forth from the struggle, unstained not only by blood, but by intolerance. No Union-man suffered any proscription at the hands of the State. Many of them held then, and continue to hold, her highest offices. Let us not then, with a well-meaning, but affected modesty, shrink from the position, of moving first in this great Southern contest. We have been willing to follow our co-States of the South, though they would not follow us. But if they all decline leading—what then? Shall we submit? Shall we acquiesce? Shall we give up the contest? NEVER, NEVER.

In times like these, all underhanded policy should be laid aside. The people, in the main, are always honest, and they like plain, honest dealing. There should be little or no holding back from them of what is proposed to be done. Nothing is so distasteful to the greater part of the community as the appearance of a double game. Of course there is a proper degree of prudence to be observed in the conduct of all affairs, which would prevent them from being defeated by general publicity; but nothing so often baffles itself, as craftiness; for when once detected, it is always afterwards suspected, and both public and private confidence, so essential to success, are forever withdrawn.

An undue deference to the opinions of their leaders ought to be avoided by the people at the present crisis. To a certain extent, those who are appointed to control, ought to be followed; but there is a limit; and leaders should be glad to have their views modified by those of their constituents. It has always seemed to me, alike creditable to South-Carolina and to her great departed statesman, that they agreed to differ on many points of public policy, by no means unimportant. He never attempted to change the sentiments of the State, nor she his, but each honored and respected the other notwithstanding the difference. So should it always be. A leadership, which requires an entire surrender of their views and wishes, on the part of others, is too exacting and inconvenient to be lasting.

I have thus, dear friends, with the utmost frankness, given you my views upon the present crisis in the affairs of the commonwealth. Let me end by reminding you, what I have seldom failed doing in season and out of season,—that to be prepared for the trying circumstances in which you may be placed; for the excitement of passions; for the endurance of hardships; for the losses of property, or of relatives and friends; or for the sacrifice of life itself, which may be involved in the issue; your only true and abiding security, is to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as your Redeemer, your King, your Friend, and your God.





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